



File Code: 1950

Date: May 26, 2017

Dear Interested Party,

The Norwood Ranger District of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests is seeking comments on a proposal to add and reconfigure ski trails in the Matterhorn and Trout Lake Nordic ski trail systems. The Telluride Nordic Association is authorized to groom the Matterhorn and Trout Lake ski trails under a Forest Service special use permit.

New Hidden Valley Trail

A new Nordic ski trail, the Hidden Valley Trail, would be added to the Matterhorn Nordic Trail system. The trail would be approximately 1.0 kilometer in length and 18 feet wide. An estimated 30 trees (8+ inches in diameter) would be cut to create the ski trail. Tree removal along this corridor would be completed in 2015 (Map A).

Grooming Changes at Trout Lake

Following are the proposed changes to the Trout Lake groomed ski trails: 1) New ski trails in Lizard Head Meadows - Approximately 1.9 kilometers of a new trail loop and connector would be groomed in the Lizard Head Meadows, a large meadow located about .5 mile north of Lizard Head Pass; 2) Lower Railroad Grade – The lower 3.1 kilometers of the railroad grade would continue to be groomed; and 3) Upper Railroad Grade - Grooming would be discontinued on the upper 1.9 kilometers of the railroad grade. See Map B.

The primary reason to add ski trails in the Lizard Head Meadows is to offer skiers an improved recreation experience. The Meadows offer rolling terrain and spectacular views of the surrounding peaks.

One reason for discontinuing grooming on the upper 1.9 kilometers of the railroad grade is to mitigate impacts to the Canada lynx, a federally listed “Threatened” species. Lizard Head Pass has been identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) as a “lynx linkage”, an area that connects known tracts of suitable lynx habitat. Groomed winter trails in this area may make it possible for competing predators, such as coyotes and bobcats, to occupy lynx habitat through the winter thus reducing the habitat’s value for lynx. Consequently, in order to avoid impacts, the Forest Service will follow FWS guidelines which direct that there be no net increase in groomed winter routes within this suitable lynx habitat. This means that the new 1.9K trail loop/connector in the Lizard Head Meadows cannot be added without reducing the trail mileage somewhere else in the Trout Lake trail system; specifically by discontinuing grooming the 1.9 kilometers of the upper railroad grade.

Another reason for discontinuing grooming on the upper railroad grade is that a 150-foot long segment of the ski trail passes through a snow slide area, posing a potential safety concern for skiers. Discontinuing grooming along this trail segment would avoid this hazard.



The change in grooming would also provide the Forest Service an opportunity to address an existing travel management issue. Currently, the groomed railroad grade tops out onto Lizard Head Pass in an area that is open to snowmobiles per the 2002 Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan (TMP). Within this open area, snowmobiles are not prohibited from riding on or across the groomed ski trail. Discontinuing grooming of this portion of the railroad grade would separate the ski trails from the open snowmobile area, thus reducing potential snowmobile - skier conflicts. This fall, the Forest Service plans to install signs on Lizard Head Pass to clearly mark the areas that are open to snowmobiles versus those where winter motorized travel is restricted.

The railroad grade, from the Trout Lake parking area to Lizard Head Pass, would continue to be open to snowmobiles per the TMP. However, it is important to note that snowmobiles are not allowed in the Lizard Head Meadows where the proposed ski trail loop/connector would be added.

Additionally, there would be no change in the winter parking situation on Lizard Head Pass. The Colorado Department of Transportation would continue to plow the two turnouts along State Highway 550 at the top of Lizard Head Pass which provide winter parking for about 7-8 vehicles.

This Nordic ski trail proposal is part of a larger vision to focus and encourage use of the Matterhorn Nordic ski trails. Per a recent decision, the Forest Service will construct a new 30-vehicle parking area at the Matterhorn trailhead this summer. This improvement, in concert with the addition of the Hidden Valley Trail, will greatly enhance skiing opportunities at Matterhorn.

Public comments must be received by June 19, 2015. Written comments should be mailed or hand delivered to: Norwood Ranger District, Attn: Judy Schutza, 1150 Forest Street, Norwood, CO 81423. Written comments via facsimile or email should be sent to FAX 970-327-4854 or to comments-rocky-mountain-gmug-norwood@fs.fed.us. Oral comments via telephone can be made by calling the Norwood office at 970-327-4261.

Sincerely,

JUDY SCHUTZA
District Ranger